

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF VENEZUELA.<sup>1</sup>

WHY the title of this volume should be what it is is not apparent. We know of British, of French, and of Dutch Guiana, but the volume before us has to do with neither of these political areas, but is concerned solely with the central portion of Venezuela. The author gives an account of two journeys undertaken by him, from Trinidad as a starting point, up the Orinoco and some of its tributaries to within 5° of the Equator. It is the land of the fabled El Dorado, a land which excited the cupidity of the early adventurers of whom Raleigh was one, the home of alleged natives "whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders," as Shakespeare, copying Raleigh, asserted.

Humboldt and Bonpland dissipated many of the illusions relating to this country in the early part of the last century, and now we have, from the pen of Mr. André, a plain, matter-of-fact narrative which adds considerably to our knowledge of the country. The author is well known as a collector of birds, insects, orchids, and other objects of natural history, and the account that he gives of his expeditions is full of interest, replete with incident, but told with a modesty and straightforwardness which invite sympathy and beget confidence.

The district traversed is mainly one immense forest more or less impenetrable except along the river-banks, interspersed here and there with open savannahs, and varied with mountains of fantastic shape and surpassing grandeur. The natural resources of the country are great, but the political state is such as to obstruct all progress, while the interior is difficult of access and the climate deadly. The author was foiled in his attempt to ascend the Améha, but, from what he tells us of that mountain, its physical features would seem to be like those of Roraima.

He had repeated attacks of fever, but his direst misfortune was in the rapids of Arichi, where in a few short seconds the work of months was lost, and for weeks thereafter the party had to struggle on foot to reach that settlement (La Prision) which some of them were doomed never to see. The account of this disaster is told in the simplest and therefore most graphic manner.

But this story of hairbreadth escapes, though attractive to the general reader, is not what will appeal most strongly to the readers of NATURE. They will be interested in the numerous notices of birds, insects, mammals, and orchids which are scattered through the pages of the volume, and greatly add to its value. There are very interesting accounts of the gathering and harvesting of the tonkabean, which forms one of the principal industries of the country, and of the collection of the balata and other caoutchouc containing products. Among the orchids, *Cattleya superba*, one of the most beautiful of a lovely genus, is the one most often mentioned. The flowers are some five inches across, rich rosy purple in colour, and very fragrant. Among other commercial products exported from Ciudad Bolivar are the feathers known in the trade as ospreys. The swamps bordering the rivers Apure and Arauca

are the abode of numberless flocks of wild fowl, among which two varieties of egret are abundant.

"It is from these egrets that the feathers which form so expensive an article of commerce are obtained. The small egret (*Ardea candidissima*) produces the most valuable plumes; from the larger birds (*Ardea garzetta*) a coarser feather is obtained which is not so much appreciated, but the wily dealer can sort his plumes so as to introduce a fair proportion of the inferior article without danger of detection. Quite a number of birds have to be slaughtered to produce a pound of feathers, only a few drooping plumes from the backs of the birds being taken. The season for collecting extends through the months



FIG. 1.—Young of the Snowy Egret. (From "A Naturalist in the Guianas.")

June, July and August; that is through the mating and breeding period. The egrets are wary birds and difficult of approach, except when they are nesting or rearing their young, and it is at this time that the collector obtains his feathers. The persistence with which the same localities are chosen by the birds for this purpose, year after year, is an instance of that extraordinary predilection on the part of many birds to repair to the spot where they themselves have been reared, for the purpose of nesting. These spots are called *garceros*, and as they are generally on private lands, the owners make quite an income by hiring out the privilege to kill egrets. As much as 2000 pesos, equal to 1000 dollars of United States money,

<sup>1</sup> "A Naturalist in the Guianas." By Eugène André. Pp. xiv+310; with thirty-four illustrations and a map. (London: Smith, Elder and Co.) Price 14s. net.

have been paid for this privilege on a single *garzero* during one season. In spite of the slaughter of thousands of these birds, the *garceros* continue to be used by the egrets, but in ever diminishing numbers. The beauty of a few feathers on their backs will be the cause of their extinction. The love of adornment common to most animals is the source of their troubles. The graceful plumes which they doubtless admire in each other have appealed to the vanity of the most destructive of all animals. They are doomed because the women of civilised countries continue to have the same fondness for feathers and ornaments characteristic of savage tribes."

In concluding this notice of a very interesting book, we have only to add that there are numerous illustrations—of which, through the courtesy of the publishers, we reproduce one—a map showing the author's route, and a full index.

#### PATENT LAWS.

THE question of our patent law legislation is again coming into prominence, probably owing to its close relationship to other great economic controversies now occupying the mind of the country. It is, however, singular that although this is mainly an economic question, the subject of our patent laws is invariably discussed solely from the standpoint of the inventor. There are in reality two interests which must always be jointly considered, namely the interests of the inventor and the interests of the community.

In a letter which recently appeared in the *Journal* of the Society of Arts, Mr. C. D. Abel, the well-known patent agent, argues that our patent laws are certainly more advantageous to the inventor than either the law of the United States or of Germany. If this be true, may I ask who derives the benefit of our benevolence? Is it not chiefly the foreign inventor and the foreign manufacturer who are the gainers, and our community who pays for it? Natural inventiveness and natural ingenuity being equally spread over the white races, we should possess the portion allotted to a population of forty-two millions as compared with a total white population of roughly 440 millions. If it be true, therefore, as Mr. Abel states, that this country confers greater advantages on inventors than any other, are these advantages not conferred on ten foreign inventors to each one of our own country?

Space forbids me to analyse closely the minor points in which Mr. Abel seeks to find advantages for the inventor in our law not afforded by the American or German law. Let me turn at once to what Mr. Abel calls (from the inventor's point of view) the crux of the question.

Mr. Abel appears to be thoroughly satisfied with the examination into novelty which has been adopted by the Act of 1902. This need occasion no surprise, as he states that he himself proposed the system. I must, however, as I did when Mr. Abel first published them, raise strong objections to the figures by which he attempts to show that the grant of a German patent, in spite of real and thorough examination into novelty, does not confer a better title and greater security to the patentee than a British patent. Mr. Abel states that just the same proportion of litigated patents were declared void in Germany as in Great Britain in the year 1896. I desire to point out that quite apart from Mr. Abel's figures the proportion of patents declared void is a matter of no consequence whatever in this connection. The greater security of a German patent lies in the fact that out of about 15,000 applications to the German Patent Office, less

than 6000 are granted. This weeding out of 9000 patents, by a careful and searching preliminary examination, carried out by a competent court, enhances the value of, and gives greater security to, a German patent. In this respect, the Act of 1902, although an improvement on the old Act, is still satisfactory neither to inventors nor to industrial interests. Even if it were true, as Mr. Abel suggests, that as many patents are annually declared null and void in the German courts as in our own, there would be more than one good reason to account for this. Let me briefly repeat some of the reasons, from a pamphlet which I published in 1901.

(1) Probably half of our patents are not worth fighting for, as they are not worth the paper on which they are printed.

(2) Patent legislation, in this country, for a man of moderate means spells financial ruin, while in Germany redress is open at a very much smaller expense.

(3) Account must be taken of the difference in the length of life between English and German patents.

But Mr. Abel's figures are misleading. Whether he intentionally took the year 1896 in order to strengthen his case or merely at random, as he says, is of little importance. The fact remains, and this he ought to have known, that fair or trustworthy conclusions cannot be arrived at by statistics of a single year. I took the trouble to point out to Mr. Abel in 1901 that 1896 was an exceptional year, and prepared a table from official sources, which covers not only 1896—Mr. Abel's year—but also four preceding years. This table, being prepared from accurate official sources, was necessarily arranged in a slightly different manner. It did not include patents litigated or patents partially invalidated; as no trustworthy statistics exist, a good deal of patent litigation is carried on without coming into court, or without being published in the official report of patent cases.

Mr. Abel's Table

	Patents 1896	Patents granted	Patents litigated	Patents wholly or partially invalidated
Great Britain ...	14,105	...	29	13
Germany ...	5,410	...	102	43

Table Compiled from German Official Sources for 1892 to 1896.

Year	Applications	Patents granted	Patents invalidated, including patents withdrawn
1892 ...	13,126	5,900	10
1893 ...	14,265	6,430	12
1894 ...	14,964	6,280	22
1895 ...	15,063	5,720	18
1896 ...	16,486	5,410	32

It will be seen from this table that thirty-two patents were withdrawn and invalidated in 1896, whilst the average for the four preceding years is only 15.5 per annum. So much about Mr. Abel's figures.

I quite concede that a searching and real preliminary examination is a controversial subject, but from an economic standpoint it must be admitted that the want of conformity existing between our law and that of Germany as to preliminary examination inflicts great injury on our trades. For example, the grant of a British patent to a foreign applicant which his own country has refused to him benefits the foreign country at our expense, the loss to us being proportionate to the value of the invention.

The compulsory working of foreign patents in this country is, however, a far more serious question than "preliminary examination as to novelty." The Act of 1902 only dealt with compulsory licenses, and, so far as it goes, it is an improvement of the old Section 22, but more stringent measures are wanted to make